ISSN 0712-7714

CEREBUS
mothers & daughters
3

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153
DEC

NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

It is November 28. I finished this issue (page fourteen was the last page) two nights ago while I was being interviewed by phone by Steve Bissette. We talked about *Cerebus* which was a bit of a change of pace. I noticed that for most "real world" interviews, I talk a lot about the book, but it takes most of the article just to explain what *Cerebus is* so very little of what I say makes it to the finished piece. Most of my interviews in the comic press turn into elaborate defenses of self-publishing and/or The Creators' Bill of Rights. Anyway, this interview will appear in *Comics Interview* #105 or 106. Doing a cover for the issue is one of the things I have to do today. Thanks to David Anthony Kraft and Fred Greenberg for setting the whole thing up so all Steve and I had to do was schmooze.

★★★★★★★★★★

I'll also be doing an interview and cover for *Amazing Heroes* #201. All of this has been set up in association with the Tour, of course. I'd like to thank Thomas Harrington, Kim Thompson and Fred Greenberg once again for doing the tough parts on this one. Mr. Harrington has even managed to find a *REAL* Cerebus fan to do the interview, so I should be able to discuss a lot of the stuff Steve and I didn't get into.

★★★★★★★★★★

I *did* talk to Reed Waller and we *will* be doing a *Cerebus/Omaha* jam piece to auction at the Minnesota stop. Chuck Austen, who has recently had to stop doing *Strips* for Last Gasp because of the sorry state of the direct market, has agreed to do a jam piece for San Francisco. Martin Wagner called yesterday to say he's picked up the illustration board for the *Cerebus/Hepcats* jam piece which will be auctioned in Houston. Larry Marder, as mentioned last issue, will be doing a *Cerebus/Beanworld* jam piece for Chicago. And Colleen Doran (comics NEWEST self-publisher; see Cerebus Preview this issue) has agreed to contribute to a *Cerebus/A Distant Soil* jam piece for the Washington stop. Where their schedule allows, each of these folks will be appearing at the convention as well, with a table to display their artwork and publications. Remember, proceeds from the jam pieces go to benefit The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund.

★★★★★★★★★★

Connie Lingus phoned to order her signed and numbered *Melmoth*, and while she was on the line, I asked her, pretty please with sugar on it, if she would agree to be fan guest of honour in New York and Pittsburgh and the Divine Miss L said yes. She'll have copies of the 1992 *Politically Ambiguous Lower East Side Cheesecake-Calendar* and other Snevil Books publications for sale.

★★★★★★★★★★

David P. Nelson will be moon-lighting from his job as Head of Production at a New York film company that produces television commercials long enough to produce a half-hour documentary of the Tour. He'll be following Gerhard and I around with a video camera at several of the stops on the East coast. He apologizes in advance for bumping into anyone.

★★★★★★★★★★

Randy Sarbacher (God help him) has decided to revive the *Cerebus Newsletter* in time for the Tour and encourages everyone to write to him with their classified ads related to the Tour and Cerebus in general. He plans on publishing it quarterly and charging $3.00 per year. I don't have time to help with it, so it is sort of up to all of you guys to help him out. Randy Sarbacher, Box 588, Clarkston, WA, 99403.

★★★★★★★★★★

Funkmaster G-berg has agreed to provide unsold dealers tables at the Shows to local self-publishers to display their artwork, mini-comics, etc. Please understand that the table space is not guaranteed, and will be offered to REAL dealers first; but any tables that are available on the day of the show, Fred is willing to donate to help self-publishing cartoonists. So bring your mini's and your self published comics and keep your fingers crossed.

★★★★★★★★★★

We have heard from a number of comic book stores in cities that will not be on the Tour (largely because Great Eastern doesn't do conventions in those cities). We will be trying to arrange a smaller post-Tour Tour to accommodate some of these stores that do so well with *Cerebus*. So far, at the top of the list are Las Vegas' *Page After Page* and Salt Lake City's *Nightflight Comics* (Mimi sent me six *very* good reasons). If you sell a lot of Cerebus and want to be considered, please let us know.

★★★★★★★★★★

I'm afraid with the Tour fast approaching, I can no longer promise to answer all of the fan mail personally. If you haven't gotten an answer to any letter sent since the first of November, and you really feel that you need one, let me know and I'll see what I can do.

★★★★★★★★★★

We'd like to welcome North Wind Distribution, a new distributor dealing EXCLUSIVELY in independent, alternative and self-published comic books. They will be starting with our January releases. Those interested are invited to contact North Wind Distribution Inc., 1565 Cliff Road, Suite 3-450, St. Paul, MN, 55122.

CEREBUS

NO. 153 DECEMBER 1991

DAVE SIM
President

GERHARD
Vice-President

LINDA BERZINS
Typesetting

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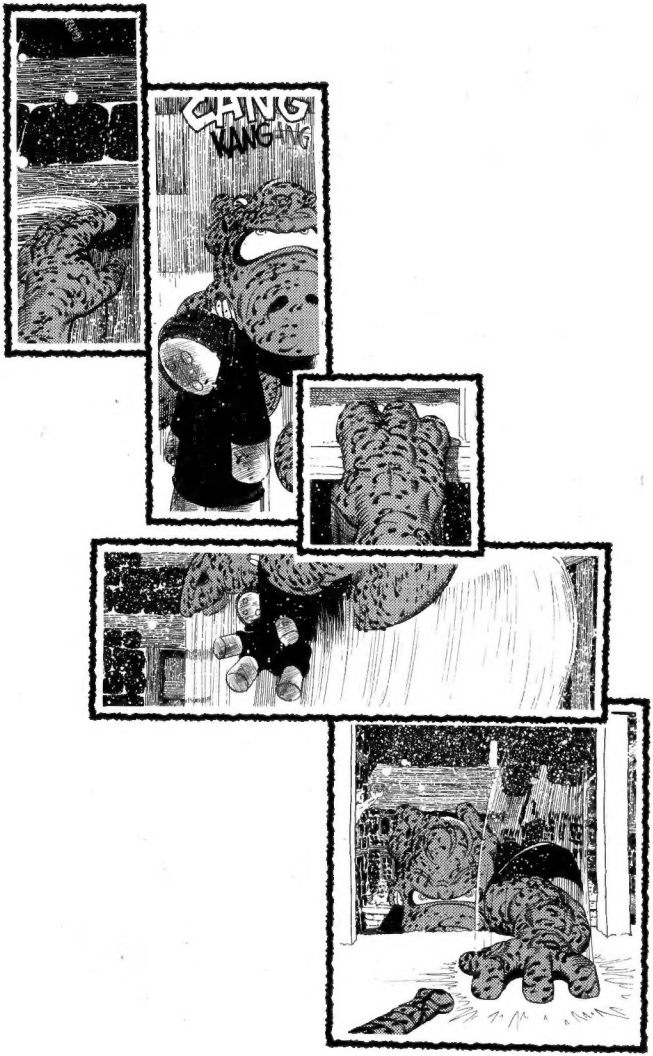
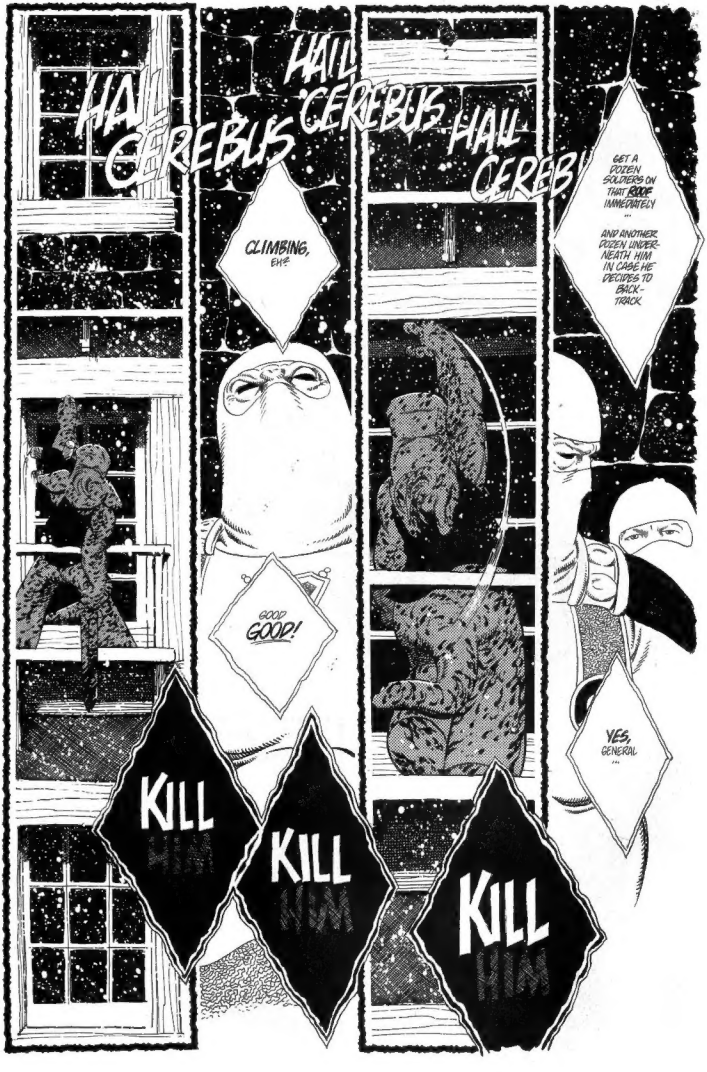
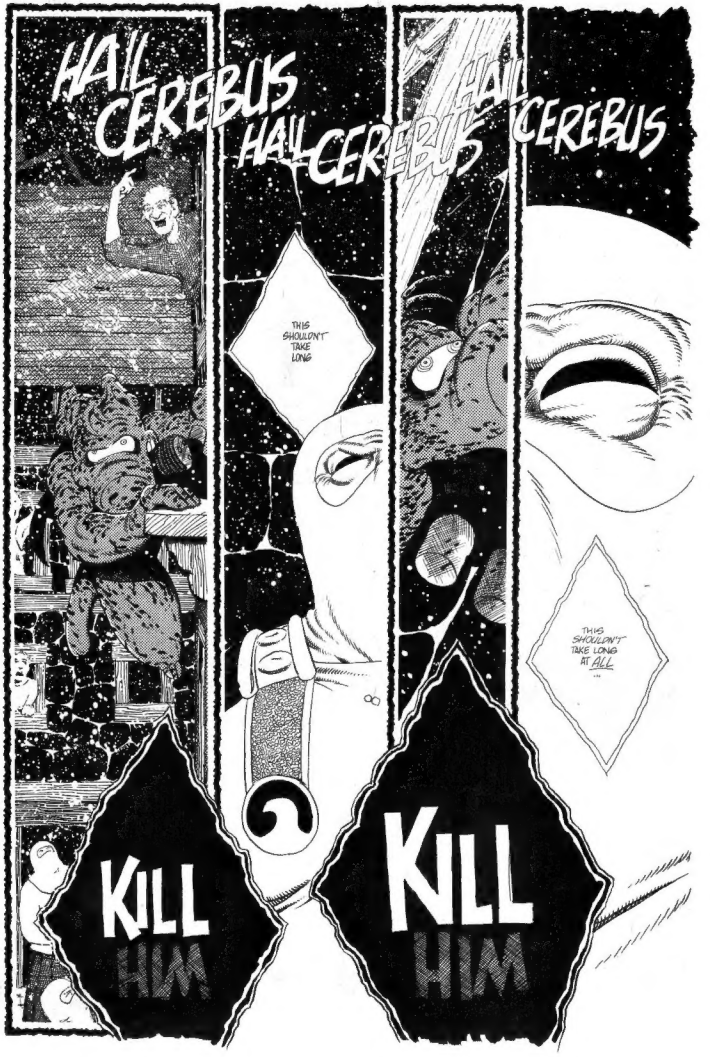

CHING
WANG

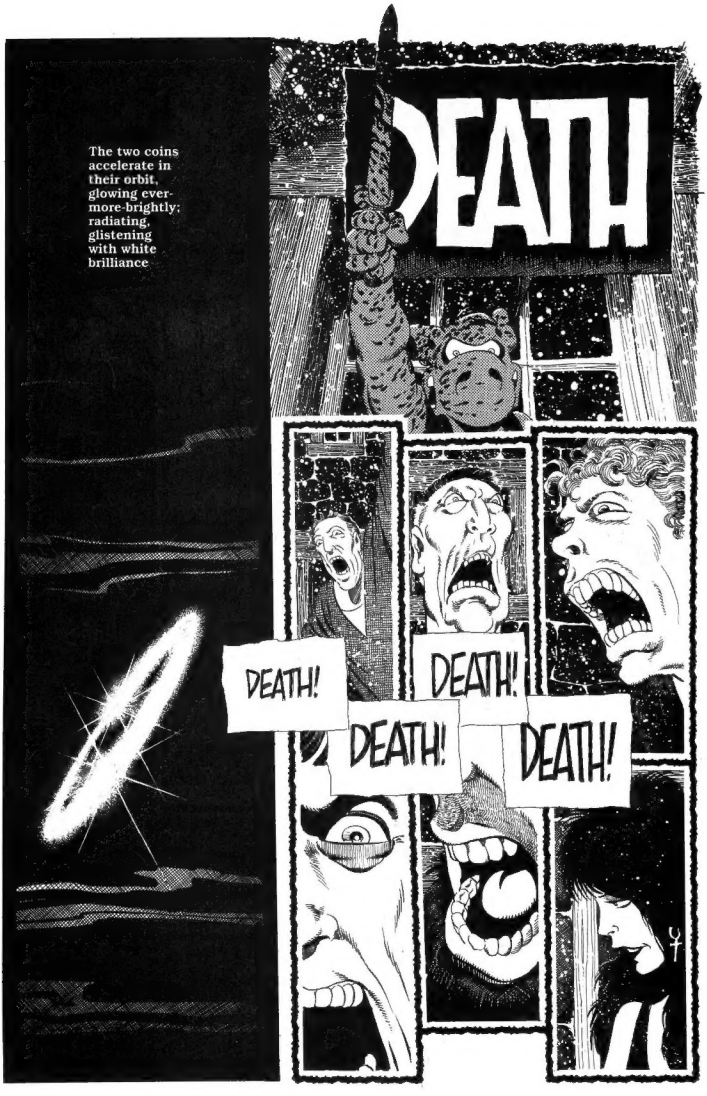

HAIL CEREBUS
HAIL CEREBUS
HAIL CEREBUS
HAIL CEREB
CLIMBING, EH?
GOOD GOOD!
GET A DOZEN SOLDIERS ON THAT ROOF IMMEDIATELY ... AND ANOTHER DOZEN UNDERNEATH HIM IN CASE HE DECIDES TO BACK-TRACK
YES, GENERAL ...
KILL HIM
KILL HIM
KILL HIM


HAIL CEREBUS
HAIL CEREBUS
HAIL CEREBUS
THIS SHOULDN'T TAKE LONG
THIS SHOULDN'T TAKE LONG AT ALL
KILL HIM
KILL HIM

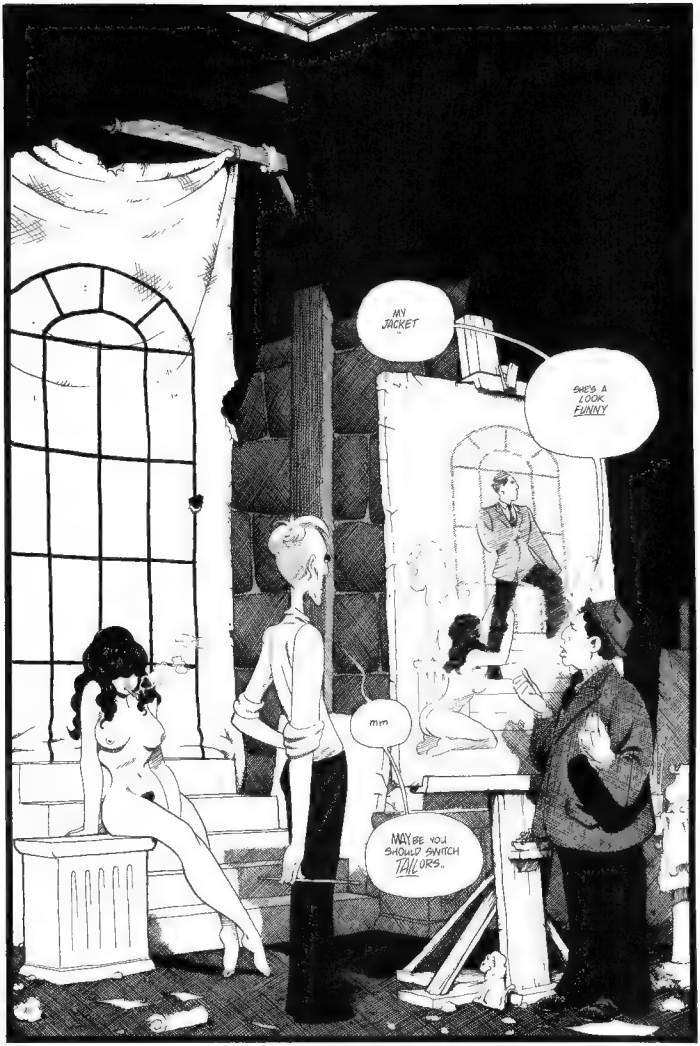
CITIZENS OF IEST!
....
MOST HOLY
HAS RETURNED
WHAT IN THE...
HURRAH!!

AND BRINGS TO YOU
THE SACRED WORD
OF THE LIVING TARIM
VENGEANCE
HRAA

FOR THOSE WHO WOULD ENSLAVE IEST!!
FOR THOSE WHO DEFILE THIS SACRED CITY!!
FOR THOSE WHO HAVE SPILLED IESTAN BLOOD!!
THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE PRICE WHICH WILL SATISFY THE LIVING TARIM!

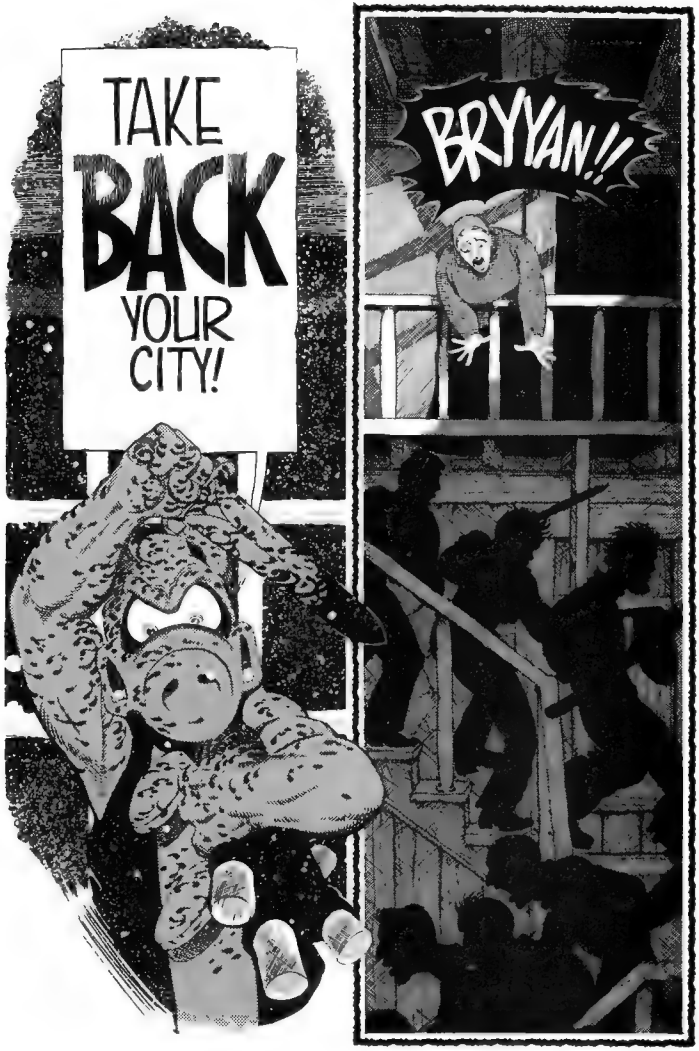

The two coins accelerate in their orbit, glowing ever-more-brightly; radiating, glistening with white brilliance
DEATH
DEATH!
DEATH!
DEATH!
DEATH!

SEIZE A WEAPON
A SWORD!
A KNIFE!
AN AXE!
WHATEVER YOU CAN FIND!
AYE
BRIAN?

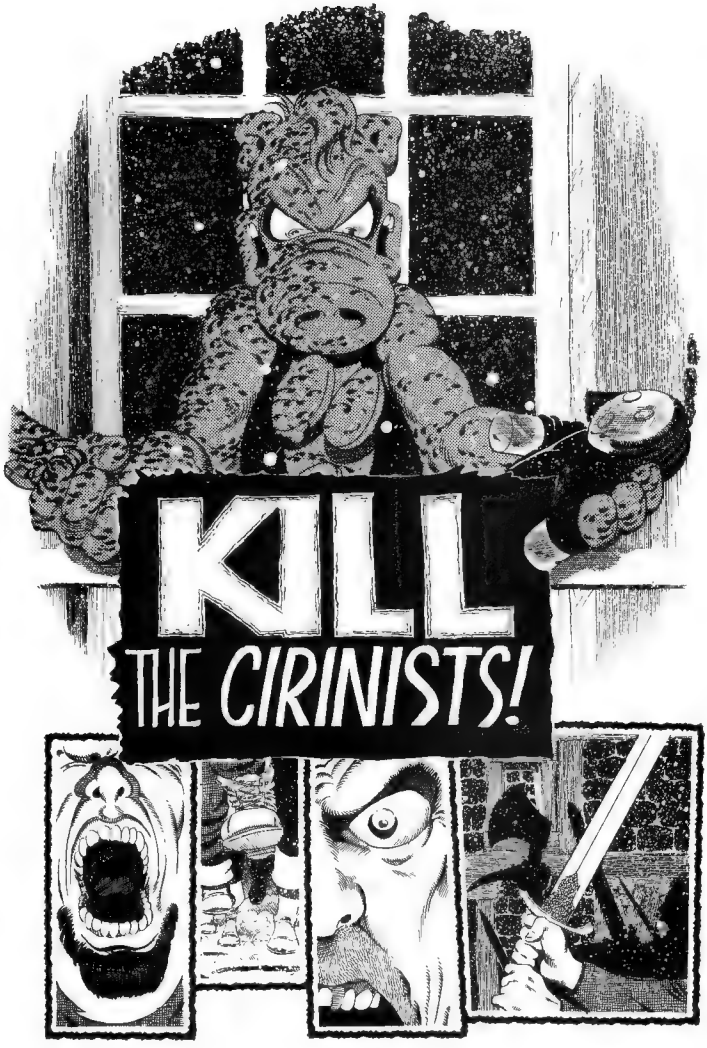

MY JACKET
SHE'S A LOOK FUNNY
mm
MAYBE YOU SHOULD SWITCH TAILORS.

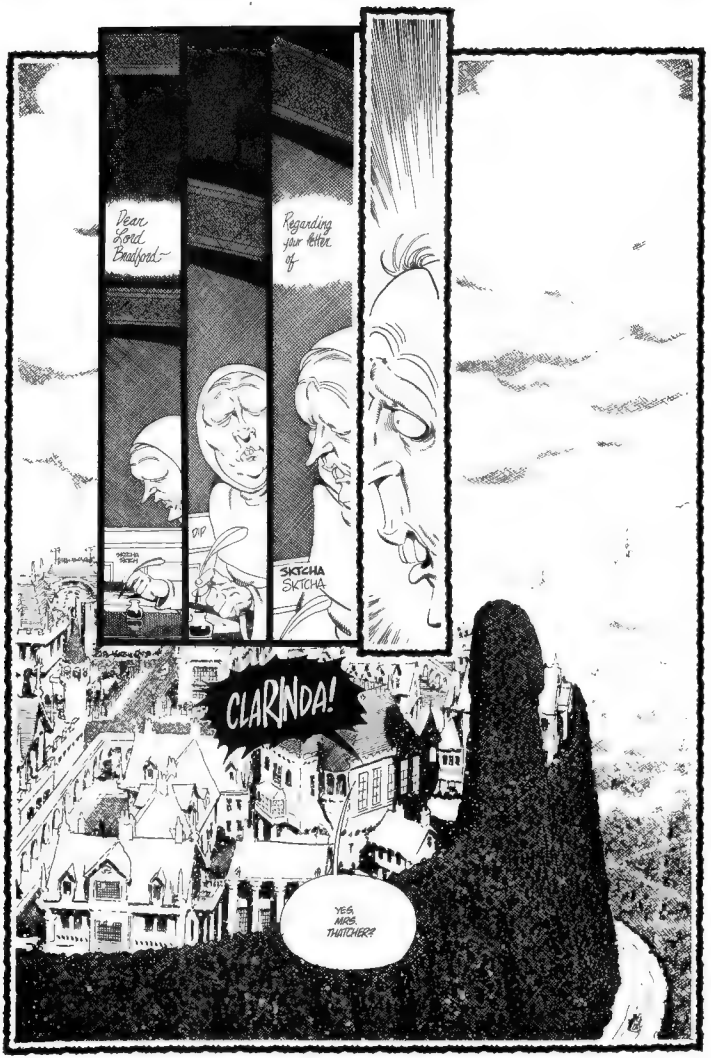
GO OUT INTO THE STREETS!
BRYAN! NO!

The silver of white grows thin
lengthens dramatically
stretching up toward the river's surface
The water surrounding it begins to boil


TAKE
BACK
YOUR
CITY!
BRYYAN!!

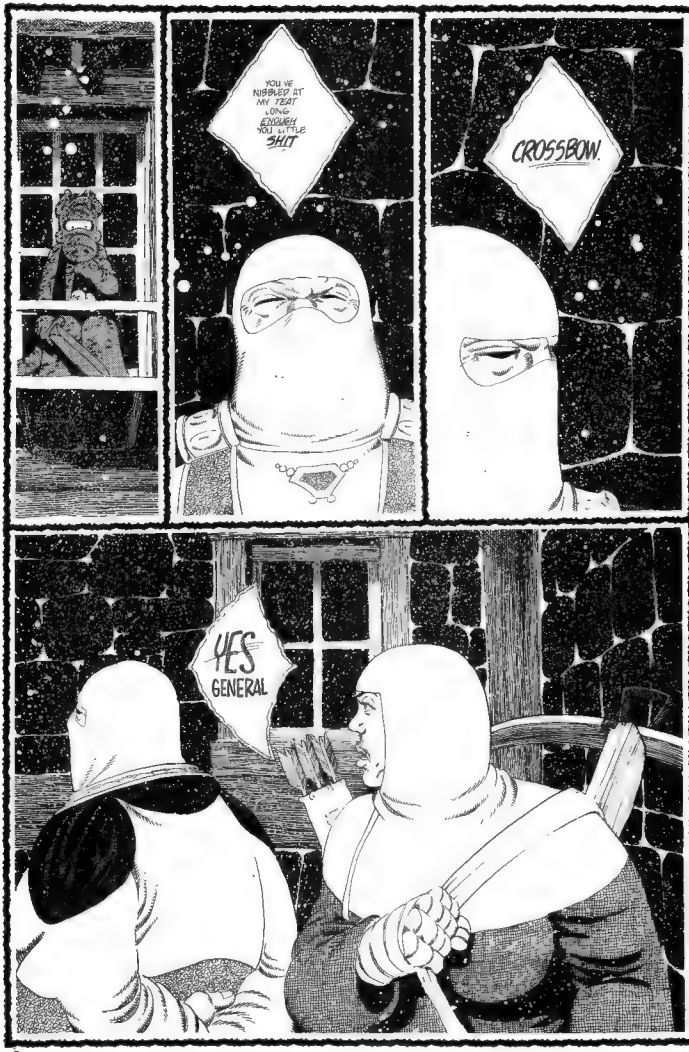
NO NO NO! MY JACKET SHE LOOKS A FINE..
THE WAY Y'U PAINT A MY JACKET...
SHE LOOKS A FUNNY
HMMM
YOU MEAN THE COLOUR OR THE ...
SETH!

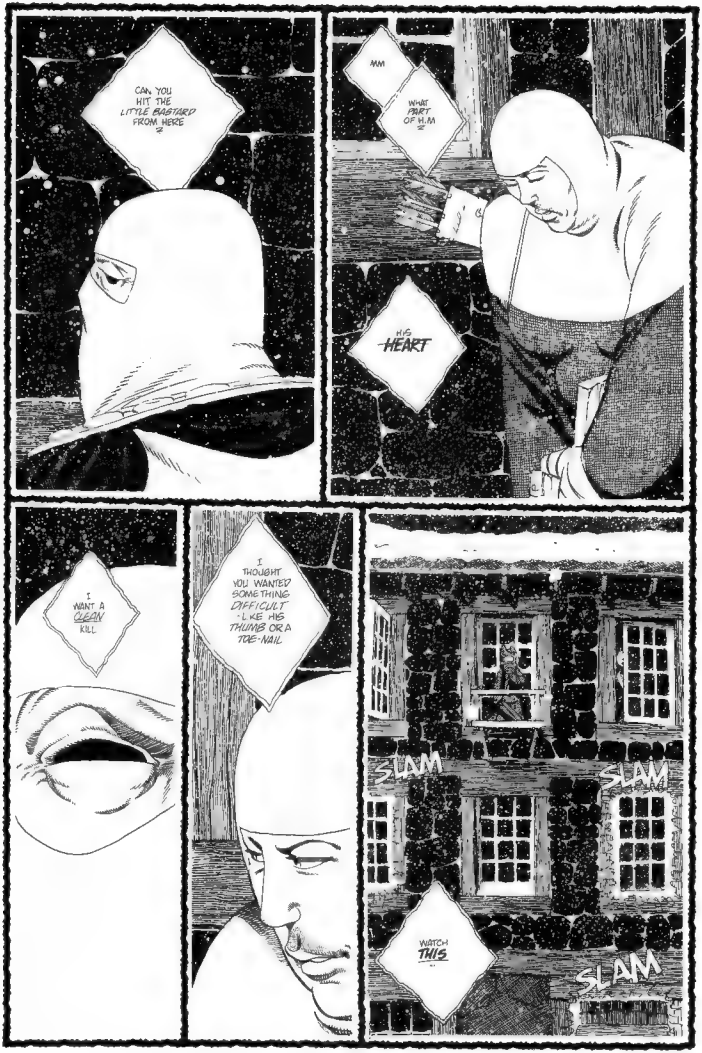

KILL
THE CIRINISTS!


Dear Lord Bradford
Regarding your letter of
DIP
SKTCHA
SKTCHA
CLARINDA!
YES, MRS. THATCHER?

YAAHAA

STAB
AAAR
GAHH
H
AAR!
SHRIEEK
UH!
H
RRIPP
HA
AND
RAN
CHOP
CHINK
GUT
OOF!
SLICE
SLICE
GUT
AIEEE
CHOP
NO!
NO!
KANG
CHING
RRRRIPP
HACK
AIEEE
HACK
RIPP


YOU'VE NIBBLED AT MY TEAT LONG ENOUGH YOU LITTLE SHIT
CROSSBOW.
YES GENERAL


CAN YOU HIT THE LITTLE BASTARD FROM HERE
MM
WHAT PART OF H.M
HIS HEART
I WANT A CLEAN KILL
I THOUGHT YOU WANTED SOMETHING DIFFICULT - LIKE HIS THUMB OR A TOE-NAIL
SLAM
SLAM
WATCH THIS
SLAM

AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

Dave and Ger,

Half way there. Alone.

For some reason I've been mulling those two sentences over in my mind since I read #150 yesterday. The connection between the two is not as clear as I would like it to be. Maybe I'll figure it out in a couple of years.

But what I felt when I realized that *Cerebus* was half complete was a sense of surprise, and loneliness. I've been through alot these past seven years, I'm sure we all have, but I never sat back to realize that a certain aardvark entered my life once a month with his life written and drawn on the page.

And I found him yesterday, sitting in his chair as usual, clutching a doll that meant something special to him a while ago. In a haze of shock, darkness, and loneliness. It took a graphic act of ultraviolence to bring him out of his brood, but it also showed a possible turning point for the complex aardvark. You and Ger know what's next, and I'll be here waiting until Cerebus' last breath.

Which brings me to my lonely realization. I didn't even remember that 150 was the half way point of the life of *Cerebus* until I saw the back cover. I'd forgotten it in the sense that I'd not really noticed the issue numbers when I picked up the new copy. I also forgot because there was no one to remind me.

I am the only one in this area of South Carolina that is still reading *Cerebus*. At least the only one I know of. Some of the people that used to read it gave up years ago when they failed to see the simple literary beauty of *Jaka's Story*. I quit going to *Heroes Aren't Hard to Find* here in town, because they kept forgetting to put my *Cerebus* issues in my subscription bag. Those issues they missed were nearly impossible to find around here, so I spent a few months searching for them. They didn't care, because they knew it wouldn't sell on the shelves.

I've been a subscriber at *New Dimension* for about three months now, and they've forgotten to put two issues in my bag. Their excuse was that they overlooked it because I was the only one that bought Cerebus there. I responded yesterday, telling them that they should be able to remember it better because of that.

So I go on reading *Cerebus* month after month, holding it like Cerebus held his rag doll, knowing that I'm alone. I don't feel anything because of it except that, fifteen years from now, I'll still be putting up with all the shit that goes with being a *Cerebus* fan.

You know, after seven years of dealing with it, I think *Cerebus* will be worth it for another fifteen years.

So that's what I feel like being half way alone.

Russell Howze
Travelers Rest,
S.C. USA

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Never have I ever felt that I should write to a comic until now. There are two reasons, first is that you produce (in my opinion) what is probably one of the most absorbing comics around. I love your art—don't ever go colour, but I guess you know that, right? The stories are highly enjoyable as is the art.

To be honest Dave, the real reason I wrote (sorry) was due to a letter in *Melmoth* #10. I'm sorry but people are really starting to P me off. Maybe it's just that I'm an immense patriot but well Damn it . . . Rule Brittania, long live the Queen and may the 'Union Jack' fly forever. Britain . . . I mean GREAT Britain is not a 'godless capitalist country'. OK, so it has its problems i.e. the recent riots which even as I write are going on. But who was it that said "While other countries have civil wars, Britain has riots"?

The Royals are great and I love 'em, so what if the Americans worship them. The crown jewels are part of our heritage and it makes me proud to be English.

Cheers for your time Dave. I really needed to get that out. People may not agree with what I have written but well it's just my opinion.

Always a loyal fan,

Michael Matthews
177 Northumberland Road
N. Harrow, Middex
HA2 7RB
England

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

After reading *Melmoth* #8 and being completely blown away by Neil Gaiman's 24-hour comic, I was going to write you a flip letter inquiring whether you felt Neil stole your thunder by killing off Oscar and using his apocryphal last words about the wallpaper before you had the chance to. Fortunately, *Melmoth* #9 came out before I had the chance to write.

I've long considered the trivialization of death by today's media—especially in movies and comics—to be much more exploitative and pornographic than sexual "pornography". I guess that since modern people don't usually witness actual death anymore—it occurs in hospitals, battlefields and other environments we attempt to avoid—it's easy for us to watch Arnold Schwartzenegger kill 40 people without even thinking about what death really *means*.

Melmoth #9 was a powerful and sobering issue. By rejecting the temptation to send Oscar into the void on the wings of some last witticism (the wallpaper remark or some variant). You have not only given your "Short Story" much more depth and resonance than it might have had, you've scored a major coup by flying in the face of the media and reminding us that death isn't easy or trivial—it's a powerful, harsh aspect of life that should not be ignored or swept under the carpet, and is done so at our own peril. Cerebus' face on the last page said it all.

Oh, and by the way, congrats on the cover of *The True North* #2—it's by far the funniest and most insightful editorial cartoon I've seen in a long time!

Andrew Johnston
441 E. 9th Street
New York, New York
USA 10009

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Do you not agree that on the whole Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* is an intelligent, enjoyable, well constructed comic, whereas everything else released by Marvel/DC is a complete and utter load of shite?

I was embarrassed by the last issue of *Hellblazer* I read and *Kid Eternity* was tired and tedious, as if Mr. Morrison were going through the motions.

My current reading list stands at *Cerebus, Sandman* and *Grendel* (if it ever comes out again).

The best book I've read in the past year is *The History Of The World In Ten and a Half Chapters* by Julian Barnes. Last year it was *A Prayer For Owen Meany* by John Irving. Current listening are the Indigo Girls 1st and 3rd albums and "Swagger" and "Beatsongs" by the Blue Aeroplanes.

Loved *Melmoth* but am hoping for a return to the storyline (I'm just a kid at heart). I'm currently reading Richard Ellmann's biography of Wilde with some interest (I would not be doing so had I not read *Jaka's Story).*

I hate to be self indulgent, but I'm afraid I'm not out of that phase yet. It's a year since Catherine left and I still love and miss her very much. Just thought you might like to know.

Everybody loves animals until you actually have to work with them. I should know, I'm a vet, and sometimes the little sods really get on my tits (although Schuss, my border collie, is obsequious enough to be o.k.).

Me and my brother, Wulf, were two of the four people who attended the Coventry convention you mention in this month's Note from the President. Small? For England it was positively HUGE. We can't all produce Disneyland, you know.

Why is it comic fans always say "attended" rather than "went to"?

Cerebus is haemaphrodite. I would have thought that was blatantly obvious.

Cheers,
Cerdic Grimbly
214 Stow Hill, Newport, Gwent
NP9 4HB
United Kingdom

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave,

"They teach us that the supreme act of citizenship is to choose among saviors, by going to the voting booth every four years to choose between two white and well-off Anglo-Saxon males of inoffensive personality and orthodox opinions."

from *A People's History of the United States*

by Prof. Howard Zinn

But then you probably already know that.

Nick Arvin

P.S. Got 150. Nice to see the gray one moving again.

★★★★★★★★★★

Bonjour, Dave.

I have been thinking about writing to you for a while now. At first, I thought I could draw a strip of my own to praise yours. An artist-to-artist *clin d'oeil.* But I got busy at school, and the only things I'm drawing these days are 'birthday comics' for my friends. Still, in my opinion, it would be the only decent way to praise your work: you and Gerhard are sharing your life's work with us, the readers. The best reply achievable would be a piece of our own life's work. Such is not the case with this letter, so I'll keep the praise short.

So I'll do like everyone else, and talk about something else than *Cerebus.* I must say that the Canadian constitutional controversy debate has been rather bizarre: two letters from hotheads (i.e. P-Whipped in Pittsburgh, issue 143, and Psycho Pat, issue 148) and another one from G. Leslie Balogh, which mentioned a major problem with Canada these days. I agree, Canadians (outside Québec) are stuck with a negative identity: to an American, they will say they are not British, while to a British, they will say they are not Americans (thank God!). So what is it that defines the Canadian identity? Beats me. The only point all Canadians have in common is the fact that they treat hockey like a religion. In fact, a recent concert from cool jazz band "Shuffle Demons" suggested a more appropriate national anthem for this country: the theme from *Hockey Night in Canada.*

I must say that the question of national unity was quickly addressed when I arrived in London (Ontario) in April of this year. You see, we are a bunch of students from Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, P.E.I. and Manitoba. I was amazed to see that while the Meech Lake accord was not to their liking, they did not know what it was about! People from the Prairies think Ottawa gives everything to Québec (remember, folks: the squeaky wheel gets oiled first . . .), while people in Québec think that this country entirely revolves around Ontario, to whom this association of provinces is so profitable that I think they should worry about their own economy rather than an independent Québec's, no matter what Psycho Pat's father's opinion is on the subject (he should know about what Merryl Lynch and Standard and Poors said on the matter). The Atlantic provinces are so poor, they dare not complain (except for Clyde Wells who put his personal interests above those of the nation, just like Jean Chrétien and Sharon Carstairs), while British Columbia is becoming another California (EEEK!).

The only way I see Canada to remain united is to redefine it. Possibly like a confederation of republics, a bit like the European Economic Community. Thing is, Québec is the only province to push the idea forward and to demand more rights. The reaction of the other provinces is fairly reactionary: "How dare you! what makes you so special so that you should have all of these extra powers we would not have?". There is nothing more special about being French-Canadian than there is about being English-Canadian, than there is being any kind or group of people you can think of. Each group is special, each in its own way. So my reply to English-Canadians is: ask for any powers which you think should be given to your own province (the Reform Party will eventually get there, if it is smart). If you like to bang on your own Francophones' heads, like you've been doing for so long, you can make it so that you won't have to feel guilty about it. But that would not be civilized.

Which brings the question of Bill 178 to mind. A law which did not satisfy anyone in Québec. Two things should be recalled here: the notwithstanding clause, used for Bill 178, implies that the law can only be applied for five years. The new constitutional proposal now limits the applicability of the notwithstanding clause to two years. The Alberta law which prevents the existence of public French schools will also eventually go down the drain, since it was allowed by use of the notwithstanding clause. Secondly, the province of Québec is an island of 6 millions of francophones surrounded by over 350 millions of Anglophones. Were the positions reversed, I think my Anglophone friends would be scared shitless about losing the thing that makes them special in the eyes of the world. Bill 178 is an ugly law. But I expect that it won't be

necessary in an independent Québec. What causes resentment between Anglophones and Francophones in this province is the fact that the province of Québec is bound by the constitution to provide services in English, even if their numbers do not justify it. Therefore English is very present in our lives. Many Québécois would like to get along with English Canadians, but they feel that the dice are loaded against them in linguistic affairs. If the linguistic status of Québec can be settled once and for all (i.e. an independent, French-speaking country), there would be no reason to resent the omni-presence of English. In any case, I think that any Québécois who would favor the complete elimination of the English culture in Québec can be quoted as a classical example of advanced cretinism. Since we are part of the North American community, we'd be shooting ourselves in the foot by denying the English culture.

I have exposed a little bit what is going on in Québec. I do not pretend being an authority on the subject, but I do want to wake Anglophones up and encourage some healthy debate. I also want to show that Québécois are not the "bad guys", and that neither are the Anglophones. I expect that from *Superman* readers.

Jean-Pierre Bissonnette
207–1100 Jalna Blvd.
London, Ontario
N6E 2M2

P.S. Hey Dave! How are the girls in this part of Ontario?

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Mr. Sim,

I would like to thank you for a number of things.

Cerebus is consistently the finest comic produced anywhere. Aside from the superbly rendered drawings, you and Ger make a great team (yeah, you know); the pacing of the story floors me. Everytime. And usually the only time I buy comics is for the art (being a visual artist) excepting works by Neil Gaiman, Alan Moore and yourself. Maybe the reason is that no one else can write. Thank you.

I love your highly motivated opinions in Notes. It's refreshing that someone can vocalize their beliefs with conviction whether anyone agrees with them or not. After all, you are the president. Now why can't our president have any real opinions? Thank you.

The most important thing is something I tried to tell Michael Zulli in a very stumbling, bashful, apologetic, gushing fanboy way at a mega-packed eastern Giga-Con at the Pent-Up Hotel in Zoo York. Mr. Zulli is a man who doesn't say much which made it hard for the shy boy in me. Needless to say, I merely went on about the Puma Blues and its influence on my artwork while Michael merely nodded. I never had the guts to say what I had come there to say. Pretty pathetic. Now I will try this in a letter.

I had aspirations of becoming an illustrator working primarily for comics. I think at the time, I may have been happy working at some major company. Then the works of many extremely talented people working independently intrigued me. It's like being in a very comfortable prison, and finally the ceiling and the walls are ripped away. Now it doesn't matter if I can make a living doing art. Believe it or not, my nine-to-five job gives me a certain freedom to produce things that I feel worthy to produce. Despite all of the flip sides of comicdom, you do make a difference. Without you, somebody else would have to work like a maniac producing a monthly independent comic, while championing the cause of creators. Thank you.

Enclosed you will find the not-so-ripe fruits of my labor. Hopefully, it will be for your enjoyment. this is a story I started before Tompkins Square Park was closed by our beloved mayor in New York. At the time, I was living in Jersey so I went into the park, camera in hand doing that real life reference thing. I nearly got the shit kicked out of me by an irate, steroid, abusive drug dealer coached on by his blottoed cheerleader girlfriend. "It would be worth going back to prison to fuck you up!" The reward for this adventure was that I lost the film and didn't find it until after I had finished the entire story. Since I started this I have moved once (will be moving again soon) and I am in the process of divorce. And you think Steve Bissette is slow. I realize now that this "story" isn't able to stand on its own as much as I had planned but I do plan to continue it some time. Now I am starting a story on Domestic Violence.

Melmoth was excellent. Between the treatment of Oscar's death in a nearly academic way and the involvement of peripheral characters it gave the story a balance. In that there was a reserved anguish on the part of the characters involved with Oscar, it behaved like the quiet moments in music that give it great strength. On the other hand, seeing Normal Roach, Keith, Mick and a very brief cameo by Pete gave the story bouancy.

The Epilogue—whoa!

By the way, Oscar in celtic translates from oz-gar meaning god-spear or divine spearman.

I loved the cover from *True North II.*

Take care.

Oscar Stern
219 Second Ave., #2R
New York, New York
USA 10003

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave—

Did you realise that you've printed a letter from me from every city I've lived in in the last eight years except Vancouver? It startled me too.

Nothing better to do,

Derek ("Derek") McCulloch
Some Coffee Shop in Vancouver
P.S. Even Las Vegas, and I only stayed there a month. I mean, chee!

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Mr. Sim,

In a restaurant over dinner a friend said: "Gee you really like black and white don't you?" and I said: "Yeah, I really do."

Yours,

Justice Martin
470 Mollie Blvd.
Holbrook, NY
USA 11741

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave,

I've written you before. Told you a bit about who I was, what I wanted to do. Bullshit like that. While I have your attention I may as well apologize for that. Sorry, man. Guess I was kinda fucked up around that time.

I was just going through *Melmoth* 150. The cover was enough to make my knees turn to jelly. The story was enough to make me sit there in my car and just keep shaking my head unbelieving. Now that's a comeback!

I was reading the letters page and as usual I couldn't help but be in awe of the closeness, the feeling of security that comes with those final pages. *Cerebus,* the story part, is only one half of a great epic. The other is those that are following the story.

Cerebus has become a part (a big part) of most of our lives, a lot of us

grew up on him, changing as he changed, matured as he matured. What I mean to say is this. We've grown up on *Cerebus*, sure. But more importantly, we've grown up with each other. Whether we like the opinions we sometimes read is irrelevant. We've become a part of each others lives (who here doesn't know the name Connie Lingus, The Ranger, Chris Romano, M'Oak). It's evident in every issue, in every secret shared (M'Oak, I among others believe it took a good deal of courage to write what you did. I know about weakness but I believe it's no longer in me to share), the intimacy involved is uniquely *Cerebus*. I guess it's only natural to thank you, Dave, for giving us something so special. Upon completion of issue 300 I believe we should have a huge gala to send the little guy off. Dinner, dancing, time to shed a few tears and bid farewell to people we only just met.

Anyway. It's not much of a letter I know. Forgive the grammatical errors. Take care. I'm gonna be there 'till the end.

Affectionately,

SaleCrier
10 Lorne Street, Box 113
Inglewood, Ontario
L0N 1K0

P.S. Missed you at *Unicorn Comics* on the 24th. I was up in Ottawa visiting friends. Damn!

S.

P.P.S. Do you actually live in Kitchener? I know you publish in Kitchener but do you live there?? My reason for asking is simply because I'm going to be up there this weekend and wouldn't it be cool if I just showed up at your door on Sunday just in time for lunch. Y'know, Kitchener isn't as big as our government would have us believe, Dave. Sleep easy. BWAHHAHA-HA HA HA (maniacal laughter)!!!!!

S.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Yes, it has been two months since I wrote to you and wondered if I could ask you some questions about "Melmoth" for my senior thesis. Wanted to wait until the storyline was finished so I could put it all together before I asked you anything. The chances of my using this material are rather decent. I've got the sort of thesis director who doesn't get upset if I want to include comic books as references in an academic paper. Heck, this guy has written academic papers on *Dark Knight Returns*, so my wanting to write about your work and Grant Morrison's strip "New Adventures of Hitler" doesn't faze him in the least bit.

Things have changed a bit since my last letter. After I got back to campus, I had a meeting with my director and told him all the stuff I wanted to look at, he reminded me that my goal was to write a 75 or so page paper, not a 300 page book. Consequently, Robert Graves, Michael Scorsese, Gore Vidal, and Clint Eastwood are all out. So much for the analysis of role-playing and performance in *White Hunter, Black Heart*, huh? I do, however, get to keep a lot of the more radical stuff, including Young Einstein. And *Melmoth*, obviously.

I think it's fun that I'm earning my college degree by writing about Yahoo Serious and Cerebus. It says something about our culture.

It's also fun that Neil Gaiman's letter in #150 got wedged between my letter and Ranger's. Luckily, I had already gotten back in touch with her before she let you print her phone number. I've been trying to call her for a few days, and she's disconnected her phone. Not to fear, though, she has my address, and I have her other one, so I'll be in touch with her in a matter of days. Like you'll be able to sleep soundly knowing that, I guess.

Anyway, I've enclosed my questions on a separate sheet of paper. I you want to see how I'm fitting *Melmoth* into the thesis, and everything else I'm examining, let me know and in my next letter I'll provide you with the outline I've developed so far.

Oh, before I go, I'm listening to Stump's "A Fierce Pancake." That fulfills my band plug quota for 1991.

Yours,

Roy Hogan
307 Kennan Hall
Notre Dame, IN
USA 46556-5615

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I'm hoping all the readers aren't so bored to shit with letters about rape that they won't read this, because I think there are some issues beyond "Is it right to have sex with a girl if she doesn't really want to." I'll keep my sob stories short, I promise.

The night of a party last year, a girl ("Kate") passed out from drinking too much. She was still breathing, but we couldn't wake her up, so we put her in my roommate's bed. About 3:00, I was tired, so I went to bed. Being drunk myself, I didn't think to ask somebody to move her. About ten minutes later, I heard "Kate" rolling in her sleep. As everybody should know, you have to keep passed-out people lying on their side—otherwise, if they vomit, they'll choke. I put on a bathrobe, and went to roll her over. Her friends walked in at the very moment I was leaning over her in my bathrobe and underwear.

I wasn't doing anything wrong, but it sure as hell looked like I was. It may have been poor judgement on my part, but that's not a crime. I got submitted to a kangaroo court, and was told that they couldn't prove I was doing anything wrong, but if they could I would have been expelled before sun-up. It didn't help that I'd built up a bad reputation by sleazing around my freshman year. I went to the administration the first thing the next day to be sure they heard my side of the story early. One of the things I mentioned to the Dean was the anxiety that the hysteria over date rape had created in me—I could have raped someone, and by the current definition of rape, not know it.

About a week later, she called me back, and told me that a girl had come to her office, and claimed I had raped her a few months before. The administrator wouldn't give her name, just that the complainant didn't want to bring me to trial. Dave, in that period, I slept with two girls who weren't my girlfriend. Neither of them said anything resembling "No", "Don't", "Stop", or "Rape".

Not all rape victims are crying Wolf, because that's obviously crap. The point is that there's a tremendous gray area between a woman giving vocal consent to sex, and a man leaping out of the bushes to attack her. One of the reasons date-rape is such a stressful issue, is because guys are afraid they will do something entirely without malice (as I did) and get expelled for it.

The point isn't that there's no such thing as date-rape either, because that's crap as well. But I get the feeling girls are under pressure to report sex that they may feel iffy about as rape. Rape is serious crime, but pressure is not rape. Under a lot of college guidelines, women have no responsibility to offer any indication that they do not desire to have sex with a person, in order to call that rape. This is an improvement from the days when a rape-victim had to prove she fought back as hard as she could,

but it also raises a whole new batch of problems..

"Kate" used to be my friend. No more. I tried to save her life, and got treated like a rapist for it. That's not the point. As Senator McCarthy, and the abortion-rights battle shows, when you create hysteria, and apply Manichean, On-Off, yes or no thinking to complex issues, people suffer for it on every side.

Thanks for listening. I'll write something funny soon.

Just sign me,

A Little Bitter

P.S. Setting all these (legitimate) issues aside, I think people are getting so hyped about Cerebus's rape of Astoria that the final moral of *Church and State* isn't getting enough time: There isn't any Heaven, and there isn't any Hell, but there is somebody watching over you, so have some respect for life and other beautiful things.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I decided to share some thoughts with you upon recently reading the letters-column of COMICS JOURNAL #144. In said column, LOC writer Brian Hibbs mentions you as an example of a superior creator influenced by a work of "junk culture," i.e., Barry Smith's *Conan*, in stating his case for some positive influences of mainstream works on the "most distinct voices of the medium." The thrust of his argument is that such influences are something one "graduates" from, and he puts the question: "how can you say for sure that the little girl who starts by reading Barbie won't become tomorrow's Dave Sim?"

Gary Groth's reply, among other things, reiterates his oft-stated belief that in the marketplace bad culture drives out good, while, with respect to creativity, good culture survives only by driving out the bad: "Artists become what they are *despite* their influences as well as because of them."

Though in the matter of creative processes I agree more with Brian Hibbs than Gary Groth, I fundamentally disagree with both of them, for both make the unilateral assumption that all junk culture is essentially the same, communication on the same "no-brainer" (my term) level. With your leave, I'll pontificate on your work for a bit in order to refute that fallacy.

All the *Cerebus*-reading world knows, thanks to your assorted memoirs, that Cerebus began as an affectionate send-up of the Thomas-Smith comic book (I don't remember if you had ever read the original Howard stories at the time; I would guess that any such reading came later and probably did not convert you into a devout Howardphile). Other influences of "junk culture" have been noted, ranging from the Marx Brothers films to the Warner Brothers cartoons. That being said, though, I tend to believe that you picked up more from your indirect encounter with Robert E. than just a sword and a Hyborian-style map of countries. And though there are various differences between prose-Howard and Howard-in-comics-translation, I'd say most of the former does come through in the early Thomas-Smith translations. All the glorious ephemeralities of pulp fiction are there—bloody battles, hairsbreadth escapes, exotic climes, drooling adolescent sexuality. All of these found their way into your early work, though usually for a comic effect, and all of them were abandoned as you became interested in other, less pulpish matters. But one element was not abandoned: the essential barbarian–vs.–civilization conflict. In many ways your ways of expressing this conflict changed—sometimes working the conflict into scenes with which Cerebus has nothing to do—but I believe it's there; inextricably tied to whatever Cerebus has been/is/will become.

That this theme has been important in the world of "real" literature should be attested by various works of authors like Twain, Cooper, and London—though in such works the actual term "barbarian" would perhaps be a misnomer for types like Huck Finn and Leatherstocking, though it comes damn close. (Some of the better Robert E. Howard bears intriguing comparison with London's themes of Nietzchean self-reliance—see my upcoming monograph, "Conan the Sea Wolf.") Like London, you, Dave, imbue the theme with more subtlety and complexity than Howard could—but it would be a poor mind that couldn't grant the devil Howard his due—that at least he was able to broadly dramatize a conflict that most of his pulpster peers couldn't have managed to elucidate.

And so we come back to Groth's assertion: "Artists become what they are despite their influences as well as because of them." Did you become whatever kind of artist you are despite Howard, or because of him? Hard though it will be for some to accept, the correct answer, kiddies, is both. All the pulpish elements that you, Dave, jettisoned early on—those were "in spite of" influences—but the thematic indebtedness is a "because of," even if it was no more than a starting-point. Pulp-artists, too, have some awareness of basic human conflicts, and if they're never subtle or intellectual, they have the virtue of directness; many of them can strike to the heart of an emotional dilemma as well as the best artists, even if the pulp-artists' next step is to go on to the next bloody battle or hairsbreadth escape.

Now I probably won't have convinced anybody that Howard's work contained the kind of relative complexity I'm claiming for it, unless they've already become convinced of it on their own: it would take a separate article to encompass any such apologia. But—and here's where I differ with Brian Hibbs vis-a-vis his *Barbie* example—it should be clear even to the most elitist comics-reader that the junk culture of *Conan* at least has more complexity than that of *Barbie*. What I missed from Hibbs' qualified defense of junk culture was any distinction between *stylistic* indebtedness and *thematic* indebtedness. The Hernandez Brothers picked up a stylistic influence from *Archie* comics, just as Dave Sim imitated the Barry Smith style—but thematic indebtedness has more to do with content. I feel reasonably sure that the Hernandezes picked up no thematic material from Archie, because there's so little there (possibly a bit more than Barbie, but only thanks to longevity)—but Dave Sim did from *Conan*, even if it wasn't the sole influence and, yes, even if the material was sometimes (though not always) subverted for laughs.

Dave, I would hope that, given your general willingness to cite things that have been influential, I haven't overly discomfited you with all this discussion of influences. There are those artists who dislike any such talk, perhaps experiencing what Harold Bloom calls an "anxiety of influence;" manifesting in an extreme wish to avoid being identified with someone else's work. This is a fair enough reaction, but at the same time, it had to be said that an artist's proper reaction to another artist's work does not have to encompass only "anxiety of influence." Said reaction should also include the "shock of recognition," the sense of recognizing a kindred spirit, be it in "junk art" or "real art." Or, if not a kindred spirit, at least someone who articulated a

good idea on which a later artist can do his own take.

Thanks for listening,

Gene Phillips

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Hi! Firstly, congratulations on *Cerebus* reaching it 'till issue 150. Who'd have guess that in '77 you'd have started publishing an independent comic that would go on and on, outlasting most other company's mediocre output, lasting well into the 90's (and beyond, probably). I'd like to think that you didn't know this would happen, but what with all the rumours about the famous Sim ego, you probably did, or at least had an idea of the icon you were creating. Whatever else people may say about you (and for all people's rantings about you, I for one would prefer to listen to someone who knows their mind and is not afraid to speak out about it) it is a fucking good achievement to last for 15 years on your own. Christ, you're only 5 years behind me, and looking back you seem to have achieved more in that time than I have.

Boring stuff: I started reading with 92, carried on from there, bought the phone books then the reprints and continued to read them all at 6 month intervals—you know, fan boy stuff. Still love the early, funny ones but appreciate the later stories more. Considering the "lack" of anything happening in *Jaka's Story & Melmoth*, there is still so much to think about in each successive issue. Whole issues have gone by with nary a word spoken by the main cast, yet still the attention is grasped and a further £1.25 after £1.25 is shelled out in the hope that more issues will help things become more explainable. If the slow pace is losing readers then they too are losing out and I feel sorry for people who only read the comic for the humour. I'll continue with the book, as I feel it is beautifully paced, drawn and written. To use a cliché, I feel I can see all the effort that is put into each page.

'Melmoth' is, I presume, designed to juxtapose Cerebus' fear of his death prophecy (alone, unmourned, etc. ...) with that of the dignity and honour with which Oscar is dying. Oscar has his friends to mourn him as he dies, yet if Cerebus continues the way he is, in his almost catatonic trance, then he is almost certainly doomed to fulfill the prophecy. One almost feels like a cosmic joke has been played on the gray guy. Perhaps the judge didn't like him and decided to tell him of his death on a whim, knowing how he'd react and hastening his demise. Or maybe it's the truth. Will Cerebus snap out of his torpor and do his best to make people love him (he failed with Jaka, at least for now) or will the next 150 issues consist of Cerebus sitting on his arse holding a little girl's hand. See, nothing happens but the imagination runs riot.

Have you, by chance, received *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett, 'coz that summary seems apparent for both works. If you haven't, I recommend it, speaking as it does of the futility of life and how one's dreams will aspire to nothing. An excellent play, but still devoid of drug references. I suppose that's another reason for reading *Cerebus*, though . . .

One of the interesting things about reading the reprints is not only in watching the development of the feature itself, but in watching the way the letters page has mutated. From its early beginnings as a typical symbol of its type ("I love your comic, here's a crap drawing I've done, please publish") it's evolved into a thing that is so much more. It's now rather like a forum of public opinion where anything and everything can be or is said. Democracy rules, eh? I see it as being akin to the radio show Happy Harry Hard-on runs in the dreadfully underated Allen Moyle film *Pump up the Volume*. With both, it's acknowledged that the main item is something else—in your case, the strip itself, in the film, music—but this acts as a springboard for something else, one of the best and healthiest areas of debate and chat I've ever read—even better than that in *Penthouse*. Sure I like reading letters that state "Dear Dave, print this fucking letter or I'll say fuck again, yours sincerely D. Fuckwitt (Mrs.)" but there's a lot more to Aardvark Comment than that. There is many an intelligent letter that has got me thinking about "issues" and likewise there is much to be appreciated from hacks that write in and tell of some trivial (to us) fact about their lives that is very important to them. To be able to open up and get something off your chest is an important thing to do, and is very therapeutic for the person involved. Freedom of speech could have been invented for this letters page.

Here's my go at getting things off my chest: A year back I was working at a pub in York (The Hansom Cab, if anyone reading this comes to York) and seeing a girl called Fiona. My best friend, Mike, owned a comic shop and things, as they say, were hunky dory. Then a new girl Nicki started working with me and as I'm sure many other men in the same situation, even you, Dave, can testify, I started getting itchy feet 'coz I fancied the arse off Nicki. Mike, my pal, also took a shine to her and asked her out, to which she said no. Then one night, I was working with Nicki and we were all alone and to cut a long story short, we slept together. This continued to happen and I eventually fell in love with her but, of course, both Mike and Fiona found out. Fiona and I split up, Mike stopped talking to me and that was that 'till Mike and Fiona started going out together. Now, a year later, they're getting married soon, Nicki and I are still together, yet, despite our best efforts neither of them will talk to us or give us the time of day when we meet. I can't shop at his store any more (he won't let me). Fiona took loads of my comics and I can't get them back and I can't get to sleep at night etc., etc. . . .

Now this may all seem like morbid self-analization but it does tie into another point I wanted to make, namely that in this world we shouldn't discriminate against women, or gays, or blacks , or whites or anything (plus this seems to be a popular debate at the moment, with all the cries of "mysogynist! mysogynist!" resounding thru your pages). The only people we should dislike, and there are a lot of them, you'll probably know some yourself, are those who bring the world down with their self-opinionated, self-worshipping, egotistical, tunnel-visioned view of life.

In short, the Shitheads.

Thanks Mike and Fiona, and others like you, this letter goes out to you,

Actually, re-reading all that, I must admit I feel a bit of a shithead myself for all my ranting and raving and carrying on. Still, never mind, at least I got it off my chest . . . Oh yeah, if it matters to anyone, I'm still in love with Nicki—I'm no mysogynist.

Well, I'll stop here. I apologize if none of this is interesting to anyone, but, then again, you can always skip this letter and go on to the preview. Thanx for listening and everything, keep up the excellent work on the comic, have lots of sex (the great leveller of all beings) and other things that letter writers sign off with,

Yours sincerely,

Simon Mendham
11 Fulford Cross
Fulford Road, York
YO1 4PB, England

P.S. In the spirit of this column, recommended listening—'Violent Femmes' by the Violent Femmes. Good, old-fashioned weird music which with lyrics like "Why can't I get just one fuck?" can't be all bad.

★★★★★★★★★★

About *Melmoth* . . .

Beautiful and tasteful, it really is. All my life, at varying intervals, birthdays and Christmases, I have been given gifts related to Oscar. He was like an obsession when I was younger. Although my dad thought it was an unhealthy interest in a "historical nancy boy", but what could you do? I mean, parental disapproval is like the seal of approval to a teenager, "you're on the wrong path so it must be good" as I used to tell people.

But *Melmoth* . . .

My dad passed away, with my brothers and sisters and my mum and myself at his side. It was long and more difficult than I can describe, but everyone who loved him most in the world was at his side, with him. Five months have passed now and those moments are as clear as yesterday, and have changed me more than any experience in my life.

Love can be hard when loss is close at hand and there are no easy ways to deal with it, but it has taught me respect and admiration for all those with courage enough to share in it.

Melmoth with each slow movement of Oscar's passing was like nothing I have read, it comes close to what I am trying to describe.

I'm sorry, when I started this letter I had not intended to be inappropriately intimate, trying on paper to say what I find difficult to articulate verbally. But your story touched me so, and while I have your ear for this moment I would like to say so.

My family has a prayer, which we say from time to time to remind ourselves that death is not the end.

"Death is nothing at all, I have only slipped away into the next room. Whatever we were to each, that we are still. Call me by my old familiar name, speak to me in the easy way which you always used. Laugh as we always laughed at the little jokes we enjoyed together. Pray, smile, think of me, pray for me. Let my name be the household word that it always was. Let it be spoken without effort."

Melmoth, with all its sad elegant beauty will always be a special story for me, and I am pleased to have this opportunity to convey some of its specialness to yourself.

So thanks again for the interest you've kindly shown in Golden Years. I hope to have more of it finished soon, perhaps when Davy Francis sees your letter, it will spur him on to work faster.

All the Best

Malachy Coney
Talisman Comic Shop
47 Winetavern St.
Belfast
BT1 1JQ

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave:

I'm glad to see Cerebus has found cause to rise from his chair. All the best on the next 150.

Greg Edmonson
#204, 15 4st N.E.
Calgary, Alberta
T2E 3R4

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Here's the promised letter, handwritten 'cause I find it so difficult to compose at the computer, even if I have loud music on to drown out the fan. The urge to keep on going back and editing . . . Also, it's nicer, as long as I can keep it reasonably neat.

So, it's the end of the first half of *Cerebus* (for you—I started with 112/113), and it ends as it began, with an 'intentional gross-out' as you put it in your *Swords* introduction printed in *Bi-Weekly* #1. It's not pretty, but it's effective. I could feel myself shaking as I read it. The extreme anger turns to fear as Cerebus realises the consequences of his actions. Still, it woke him up, didn't it?

Melmoth, until the latest issue, has followed on from *Jaka's Story* in its lack of "action". With Cerebus catatonic and Oscar slowly sliding to death, there's a limit to conversation as a narrative mode. It takes the finest story-telling technique to maintain interest in letters and near-monologues. You deliver. Your ability to communicate emotions through the lettering is unsurpassed; when added to your range of facial expressions and body-language, and writing, *Cerebus* is a heady brew. Gerhard's backgrounds give it an incredibly solid setting. In other comics you so often find backgrounds that are blank, or consist of two sketchy lines, which symbolize 'the artist couldn't be bothered, or was in a hurry, or can't draw backgrounds." In *Cerebus* an incomplete background tells you something. It seems to me that Gerhard's hatchings are becoming finer and more complex, while your art especially on Reggie and Robbie, with their dark hair and dark jackets, becomes even more contrasty—an interesting combination.

Oscar's story forms an interesting contrast with the treatment of the younger Oscar in *Jaka's Story.* There, you take Oscar at the height of his powers and extrapolate him into your world, as you have done with (most notably) Groucho Marx. In *Melmoth,* however, you have no such freedom. You have to do it absolutely by the book, otherwise it would be, well, just wrong. It doesn't feel like part of ancient Estarcion. It's Paris in 1900 and keeps aardvarks and cirinists and the like at arms length after *Melmoth One.* Reggie looks out on Posey's arrest as a curiosity. Oscar's story is very smooth, and quietly tragic, but there's no suspense there. There is never any possibility that Iest's Oscar will escape the fate of Paris' Oscar.

Meanwhile, Cerebus is just sitting there, with the other characters just kind of happening around him: Dino, Janice, Doris, Mick 'n' Keef. The latter pair form part of a stream of minor characters from *Church and State* which seems to say, 'yes there is still a world out there.' Dino's story, and Doris', seem to be left hanging a bit, but they were more like character sketches than stories —you can't provide a resolution to every minor character's story (unless you kill them or throw them in prison, which you have done quite a lot.) The violent ending brings Cerebus out of his trance most effectively.

About six weeks ago I went up to stay with my brother (hi Dave) in Sheffield. While I was there I read his friend Rel's *Church & State* books—the first time I'd read right through. When I came back I had a cold. As far as I know, no one there had a cold, so I must have caught it off Most Holy. I didn't sneeze fire, though.

Church & State is very—um—impressive isn't it? It does beg a few questions, though. I'm sure you know what they are; and I trust you'll answer some of them in *Mothers & Daughters.* Most of all, I want to know what happened to Astoria. She's the most fascinating character in *Church & State,* and indeed the saga to date. Her ability to keep her head in the worst circumstances—chained up and raped—is remarkable. Her keeping her sense of irony—'see you in court, boys'—

when her schemes collapse is brilliant. When's she coming back?

And then there are the letters. During *Melmoth* there have often been ten or more pages of letters on an increasingly wide range of subjects—not just those raised by the story or your notes. Letting us ramble on like this is a worthy service—one that sets *Cerebus* apart from the crowd of comics in yet another way. I do have just one reply to make, and that's to Chris Savia in 150 ("Nobody marries the bass player"). Chris, the reason nobody marries Bill Wyman is that they're all too young. By the time Mandy was old enough to marry him it was over in no time. Hmm. Does this mean that Ron Reagan was underage once? Wow.

That's all.

Rob Brewer
46 Devonshire Rd.
Bristol BS6 7NL
England

P.S. I'm not going to say what I'm listening to because I really *really* don't believe anyone cares.

★★★★★★★★★★

Mr. Simes,

I am a Brazilian boy, I am very beautiful. I have read your pen-pal magazine and it is very good, but less drawings and more boys. I like the cute American boys, and I want one. I want the boys who don't like the girls. You have plenty so give me some. I am clean. I have money.

Afectnosamente,

Paddy Jimenez (Brazilian-Irish)
Loughborough Park
Brixton, London SW9 8NP
England

★★★★★★★★★★

Unto the Good Inhabitants of **Aardvark Comment**,

As I enter the room, my gaze is captured by the rows upon rows of speaker grills in the walls, each with its own little presspad and label underneath. The room holds nothing else, but it is not empty. I read the labels, and just that takes no little time.

Some of the presspads are old and dusty, fading and brown. The earliest have labels that read "Dave and Deni", "Elrod", and "Bring Jaka Back". One early one is bright purple with little yellow polka dots and reads "Mike Bannon". When pressed, it makes a sound like a duck. Later on there is "Derek and Mike", "BOB the Computer", "More Bloodshed!", "More Humor!", "More Lord Julius!", and suchlike.

I tire of reading them, there are so many. One early label, "Dave Sim is God", has been taken down and replaced with a gold plague with the same inscription, but there is graffiti all over it. "Gerhard Was Here" is scrawled across it in watercolor.

Pleading age and withered bones, I move over to the later additions. The grill labeled "Cassandra the Witch" smells faintly of sandalwood and jasmine, with a hint of old blood. "Connie Lingus" has photos around her grill, and the presspad has the give of hot perfumed flesh. I touch it for a while, with my eyes closed, and what I entertain inside my musings I will not tell you. I press "M'Oak" and listen. I do not pretend to understand all that he is from such a shallow source, but I salute his courage for trying to understand his own drives. Many, many other names surround his, all fighting for space, but I have no time. I must add my own droppings to this mix.

After a moment of thought, I approach the waiting, staring grills. A bit of effort enables me to push and hold three presspads simultaneously; "Feminism", "Pornography", and "Masturbation". (All three are bright and new, although they have obviously been here for some while) I clear my throat and speak clearly into the grill.

"For some reason each of these subjects has been presented as "either/or" problems, and this confuses me.

"*Feminism* — Women **must** be treated like **this**, Women have **always** been treated like **that**, and so on and so forth. Not by me, ladies.

"Militant feminist females seem to me to be women who want to be alpha males Militant feminist males seem to be men who wish to let them. Many females and males wish otherwise. Is it not enough to act the way you want to instead of forcing others to treat everyone the way you wish to be treated? Again, I am confused.

"Here is something I know, or at least something I believe: "Men and women are not equal, as equality implies interchangeability. They are complementary, as they are built to be.

"Attend me: Humans may breed at any time of the year.

"The female ovulates and is fertile for only a few days out of each month.

"Therefore, to maximize the chances of progeny, the male must be fertile and must be able to come into sexual heat at the drop of an eyelash. Simple and natural enough, and this, coupled with the constant media blitzing and the social influence, easily answers the question "Why are men such horndogs?" It also explains the differences in the thought processes.

"Up until puberty boys and girls are in fact equal and interchangeable, with any differences attributable to social imprinting. When puberty announces itself, the following things happen/occur:

"The female begins to swell in the chest and hips, and her menstrual period kicks in. At a much earlier age than males, females are exposed to their own vulnerability, their own fertility, and, to an extent, their own mortality. They begin to mature in certain areas out of necessity. They run headlong into the confounding contradiction consisting of what society and parents expect vs. what their body really wants to do.

"The male begins to experience erections in the mornings. In school. At home. Even in situations that haven't a hint of arousal potential in them, the young male will get aroused. At this point in his life, it's what he's for. He has become an ambulatory hydraulic system; pressure to ejaculate builds up and will find release, either voluntarily (sex, masturbation) or involuntarily (nocturnal emissions). *Everything* becomes a sexual stimulus, simultaneously annoying and exciting. Some males mature quickly and learn to control their pressures and their passions. Others do not. Both are regarded as immature by females at the same stage because while females are also sexually curious they are not quite as driven. Attitudes and incidents arising from social interaction and social friction at this point will affect the person involved for the rest of their life.

"Women have difficulties truly understanding men because they (women) don't have a dick. Men have difficulties truly understanding women for precisely the same reason. But they can all try. There are, obviously, any number of exceptions to everything I've just said. "The average is that which nobody quite is."

Masturbation—Almost unavoidable, so the point is moot. As long as it's not so constant or prevalent as to be socially-crippling, go to it. The same goes for any other form of sex whatsoever, excepting only non-consensual sex. (I stopped using the word "rape". It calls up the image of the teenager in a mini-skirt parading down an abandoned alley. Forget it. Whereas non-consensual

sex is any form of sex with an unwilling partner, a partner who changes their mind halfway through, or a partner who is not able, physically, mentally, or emotionally, to make an informed consent.)

"*Pornography*—No such thing. Pornography is a relative judgement, and there is no idea, picture, or sound that everyone in the world will agree is pornographic. There will always be erotica, because humans are aroused very easily by words and pictures. An aside: curiously enough, the same women who shriek about x-rated movies treating women like sex-objects and worse, who rant that pornography encourages the rape of women, these women are the ones buying the novels with the brightly colored covers that all tell essentially the same story of a strong woman who is won and taken by a scoundrel of a man whom she knows to be "bad" for her but she can't help herself. End aside. Child porn is evidence of a crime and should be treated as such. It does not enjoy the protection of the First Amendment because the principal subject could not have given informed consent to its creation, and thus it violates the subject's right to privacy. Use it for evidence and then give it to the child to enjoy its destruction.

Exhausted suddenly, I stop. The next grill is labeled "Favorite Obscure Bands" but I don't feel up to it. I sit back for a time and content myself with just looking over the walls of Aardvark Comment. I've seen it go from a pen-pal kind of letters page to a decidedly weird sort of "Let's Try and Impress Dave With Our Strangeness" letters page to a "Look at all the Pictures of Dave With All Those Girls and Alcohol" letters page to a "Who's Trying To Screw Dave Over This Month" letters page to a "What's Dave Gonna Say To The Distributors This Month" letters page to a "Dave's An Asshole" letters page to "Dave Answers Everybody" to "Dave Insults Everybody" to "Dave Insults Everybody, Except Connie" to "Dave Doesn't Answer Anybody" to "The Readers Answer Each Other". In all these years I have seen only one constant in these pages, and it is this: Dave has gotten "Have Cerebus Do This" kinda letters since issue 3, and while he has read and answered them all, he has never bent the book to please anybody. Cerebus is your dream, Dave, and that's the main reason that we've all hung around. We want to know what you've got to say next.

I can anticipate the new additions to this room. There'll be new grills labeled "Cute Supreme Court Justice Tricks" and "Sexual Innuendoes and You". After the last issue, the "More Bloodshed" label will be picked up and dusted off, but only by those who missed the point that this particular bloodshed fit the pace of the story perfectly.

I eye the last grills warily. "Marijuana" and "My Personal Penthouse Forum True Story" and "Cirinism" and "The Third Aardvark" and "Letters About the Letters Page". They call to me, but they must wait. I have thrown out enough meat, now I must needs contain myself until I may see what outrages my offerings might yield.

Cat's ass.

Chris Bridges
1525 13th St.
Orange City, FL 32763
(904) 775-5325

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Y'know, you don't make things easy for us polite people out here. I mean, here it is only three days since I mailed out my *last* note of heartfelt thanks and here I am writing another. You'd better be careful, too. You keep this good natured crap up and people might start to think that you're no longer an asshole. There really isn't much chance of that happening, though. All any of us has to do, should we start to feel in any way benevolent toward you or start to believe that somewhere inside that hardened personality beats a truly generous heart, is call up Gary Groth. He'll set things straight.

In the meantime, though, I'd like to thank you for the twenty copies of *Cerebus: Church and State* #17, which contained my Single Page submission. It may be business as usually for you to send them out, but I was genuinely surprised to find them in my letter box this morning, a feeling quickly surpassed by the sheer happiness of it. I must admit that monetary situations forced me to limit my purchase of the issue to a couple of copies, so to receive these extra copies is a joy indeed.

Y'know, I'm beginning to realize that you have genuine feeling, genuine compassion for the struggling, aspiring comic artists out here, especially for those of us who want to do unique, worthwhile work, but find ourselves limited by an industry that banks on conformity and mediocrity. You've constantly used your position as a successful, independent artist/publisher to promote the work of other independent artists, often giving it exposure that it dearly needs but, otherwise, might not receive. You do this in the Preview section of *Cerebus* and, on a smaller scale, in the Single Page section of the *Cerebus Bi-Weeklies.*

The latter of the two, I think, is the more important, but not in an obvious way. While the preview can act as an advertisement for work that can be purchased, the impact of the Single Page to the artist is a bit more intangible. It allows for even the most unknown, and sometimes raw, talents to see their work in print and taste the joy of it. And each artist, and I'm sure there were many, for whom the Single Page is their first Publication, feels that subtle boost, that pat on the back, that whisper, "You see, it *can* be done. Keep at it." This sort of thing is invaluable to the confidence and emotional well-being of a young, struggling, insecure artist trying to succeed, or at least survive, in an often forbidding industry. Trust me on this. I know. I'm one of these people and, I'm quite sure, not the only one. Thus, I know I'm not alone in feeling grateful to you for your generosity.

I can imagine you arguing that thanks are unnecessary, that this is just business, that the Single Page helps you sell books. But you know as well as I do that a hundred and fifty dollars is a healthy fee for one page from an unknown artist and you know, also, that few copies of *Cerebus: Church and State* are bought simply for the Single Page feature. I don't know for sure, of course, but I tend to believe that the idea of it was, from the start, a conscious effort to do something for the hundreds (and there *have* been hundreds) of hopeful artists for whom a page in your book was like a ray of light through the clouds. No one can tell me that this was not part of your original thinking when you came up with the idea of the feature. And it is a great thing, too, that you've done, when one considers that this sort of sympathy is practically nonexistent amongst the rest of the comic book publishing industry.

You know, when I *do* consider it, I have to think that maybe, just maybe, you're really a kind soul after all, and not at all the asshole that you've long been rumored to be.

Don't worry, though.

I won't tell anyone.

Sincererly,

David Chenette

P.S. I wouldn't mind seeing this in Aardvark Comment. I think it's high-time some of the points I make in this letter were voiced aloud and I hope that modesty won't prevent you from printing it.

November 6, 1991

Dear Dave —

This is a belated thank you for your return of the artwork from *Cerebus Jam #1* and to finally pass along this xerox from my sketchbook of that period. I've had it sitting around the studio for a month or more, but it took the arrival of your recent Cerebus reprint issue with your own Squinteye sketchbook page that provided the push for me to finally bundle it up and get it out of here and into your hands.

It is the page where I sat down to hammer out what the finished version of Squinteye would be after receiving your pages with 'Squinkeye' sketched in. Finding extra room on the page after finishing up, my mind turned to other cast members aging and what effect that might have. I decided Olive would rebel against growing older by dressing younger, hair dye and (carrying it to the extreme, of course) joining a punk band. Bluto's incarnation came after dinner at a local Mexican restaurant with Bret and Pat Blevins. We were seated near a too-loud, 3-piece suited, chain smoking, martini-swilling commuter-type who made dining a chore for the rest of us by his determination to have more **BIG FUN** than anyone else in the room and make sure we all knew it too! At some point I realized he was Bluto, shaven, cleaned up a bit, but still a bully . . . Swee'pea, I realized would want to rebel against his adopted daddy when he hit his teen-age years, eschewing violence for a more sedate philosophy.

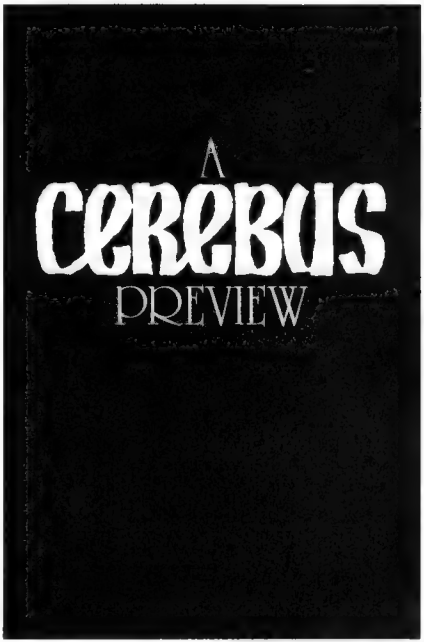
Anyway, I was amused when I ran across this page recently and thought I'd pass it along to you by way of saying thanks. Feel free to print it somewhere if you'd like (and your lawyer deems it prudent . . .)

Your current work continues to interest and oft-times astonish. You and Ger do a consistently fine job.

Thanks again for all the comics!

Terry Austin

TO-NITE ONLY:
OLIVE and the PITS!
mutter mumble mutter
BLUTO
THE TERRIBLE
(TAX ACCOUNTANT)
SWE'PEACE



Colleen Doran and I got into a big fight over the phone about self-publishing some months back and hung up with a kind of mutual "never darken my receiver again". I felt bad about it, but I really thought she was intentionally not listening to what I had to say although she maintained steadfastly that she was. When I saw a listing for *A Distant Soil* number one, some time later under the Aria Press imprint, my heart definitely skipped a beat. It was just one mention (in *Amazing Heroes* I believe) and I tried not to get my hopes up too high. It was certainly one of the happiest days in recent memory when my complimentary copy of the first issue arrived. I sent Colleen a note of congratulations and an offer of *Preview* space (in case we were still "not speaking"). The phone rang early the following week and there I sat, with a big grin pasted on my face, as I listened to the trials and tribulations of the new self-publisher; the mis-printed page, the books she had to pack herself, the advance copies that never showed up at her first convention as a self-publisher. At last she ran out of breath (she's just *little*, you know) and there was a pause, followed by "but aside from that, it's SO *EASY*!!" and a characteristic gale of Doran laughter.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is with the greatest pleasure that I introduce to you, writer, artist publisher Colleen Doran of Aria Press.

Long may she reign.

ARIA PRESS

A Distant Soil is a bimonthly black and white comic series, 32–40 pages, with painted front and back covers and a $1.75 cover price. It is entirely creator-owned and published by Colleen Doran.

A Distant Soil is the story of one mom, four kids, a house, a mortgage and a dad from outer space. It is told in two timelines simultaneously; *Immigrant Song*, which tells the story of the youngest children, Jason and Liana Scott and how they become involved in a plot to stage a coup on their father's homeworld, and *Seasons of Spring*, the story of their childhood. Material from both stories is included here.

A Distant Soil #2 also features a short story written by Jo Duffy writer of the American adaptation of *Akira*, and writer of Marvel Comic's *Star Wars, Power Man and Iron Fist, Classic X-Men, Fallen Angels, Wolverine,* as well as many others. She has also written for DC's *Batman* as well as *Dark Horse Presents* and *Creepy.* Entitled *Souvenir,* this short story is also drawn by Colleen Doran and pages are included here.

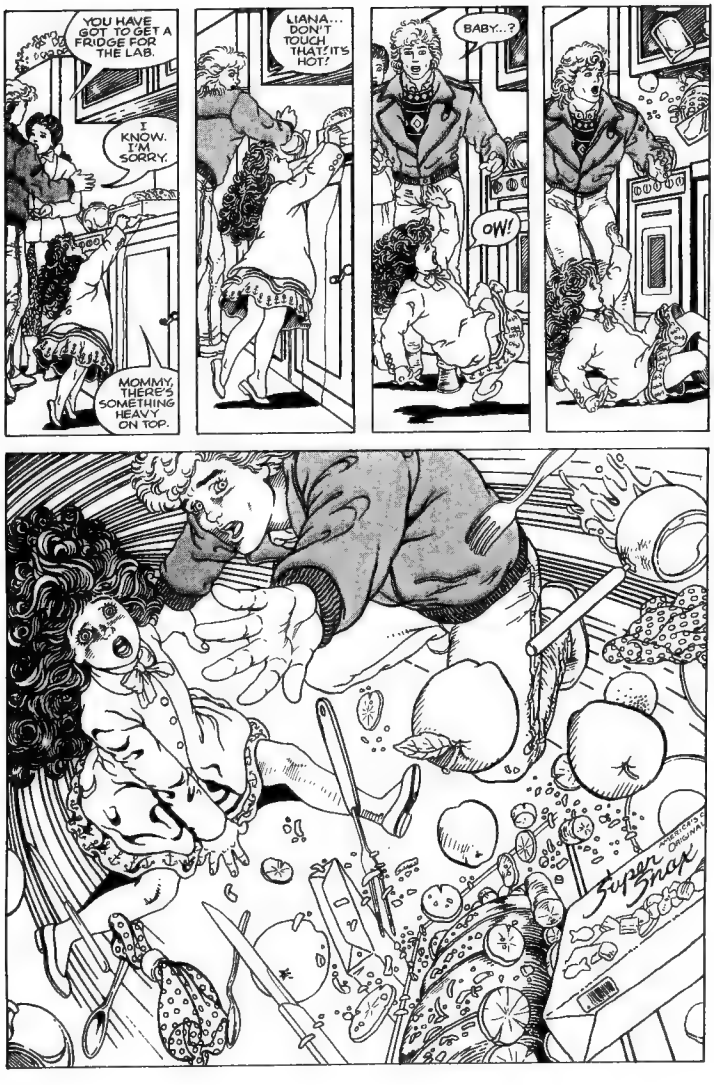
A subscription to *A Distant Soil* is $12.50 for eight issues U.S., $14.50 Canada and Mexico and $20.00 overseas. Please make all payments by check or money order in U.S. funds to Aria Press.

A Distant Soil, Immigrant Song is copyright © 1987 Colleen Doran; *Seasons of Spring* is copyright © 1991 Colleen Doran; *Souvenir* is copyright © 1990 Jo Duffy (story) and Colleen Doran (art).

SUITE 173, 12638–28 JEFFERSON AVENUE, NEWPORT NEWS, VA 23602

GET THE CAMERA!
THE ALARM! DON'T LET HIM--
RING
DAMN! LET'S GET OUT OF HERE. BLOW THE DOOR.
WE'RE GOING TO GET IN TROUBLE.
WE'RE NOT STICKING AROUND TO GET CAUGHT. C'MON.
LIANA, MOVE!
LIANA!
WAIT--
OH F'R CRYIN' OUT LOUD...

CARI, TIAR, WHAT'D YOU BRING ME?
WE DIDN'T BRING YOU ANYTHING. YOU HAVE OVERDUE BOOKS.
JASON, DON'T TEASE YOUR SISTER. CHILDREN, HELP MOMMY SET THE TABLE.
WELL, THEN I'LL JUST LOOK AT ONE OF YOUR BOOKS.
DR. SEUSS... IS THIS SCIENCE FICTION...?
AEREN, THE ROAST LOOKS READY.
MOMMY, I NEED NAPKINS.
THEY'RE UP ON THE COUNTER, BABY.
I WAS GOING TO MAKE A SALAD WITH THAT.
OKAY, BUT I DON'T THINK THAT LETTUCE IS FRESH.
UGH. THERE'S AN ECOSYSTEM IN THE CRISPER DRAWER.
THE MAID HAS ONLY BEEN ON VACATION FOR A WEEK. LOOK AT THIS!
JESSICA, DON'T THROW THAT OUT, THAT'S ONE OF MY EXPERIMENTS!
MOMMY, THE NAPKINS ARE TOO HIGH.
AEREN, WHAT IS IT DOING IN HERE!
IT HAS TO BE KEPT COLD.
MOMMY, I CAN'T REACH!
IT LOOKS LIKE A YOGURT CULTURE WITH LEGS...


YOU HAVE GOT TO GET A FRIDGE FOR THE LAB.
I KNOW. I'M SORRY.
MOMMY, THERE'S SOMETHING HEAVY ON TOP.
LIANA... DON'T TOUCH THAT! IT'S HOT!
BABY...?
OW!
SUPER SNAX

DOES THIS MEAN WE DON'T HAVE TO EAT THE POT ROAST?
JASON, YOU'RE NOT FUNNY.
WHAT WERE YOU DOING REACHING FOR THAT HOT PAN? YOUR POOR HAND. WE'LL PUT SOMETHING ON IT.
I HAD TO GET THE NAPKINS, MOMMY.
I'M PROUD OF YOU. YOU'RE GETTING TO BE A BIG GIRL.
SHE'S NOT SO GREAT.
WELL, YOU CAN'T DO ANYTHING. YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S STUPID.
JASON'S A DEADHEAD.
ALL RIGHT. THAT'S ENOUGH.
THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH JASON.
EVERYONE IS DIFFERENT AND EVERYONE'S POWERS DEVELOP AT DIFFERENT TIMES. MOST PEOPLE NEVER GET ANY. YOU KNOW THAT, AND WE'VE HAD THIS DISCUSSION BEFORE.
WELL I DON'T WANT HER DUMB POWERS.
WELL, THEN YOU WON'T GET THEM. NYAAH!
WE WANT PEPPERONI PIZZA.
CHEESE PIZZA, MOMMY!
MAKE LIANA CLEAN UP HER MESS, DAD.

WELL, I CAN'T SAY YOU DIDN'T WARN ME.
I HOPE I DIDN'T SHOW HOW UPSET I WAS IN FRONT OF THE CHILDREN.
NO, OF COURSE NOT.
JESS, I NEVER DREAMED LIANA WOULD HAVE THAT KIND OF POWER. CARL AND TIAR'S TELEPATHY IS NORMAL, BUT LIANA--SHE'S SO YOUNG. I'VE NEVER SEEN THAT KIND OF ABILITY IN A CHILD.

WELL, THERE WAS SEREN, BUT--IT'S JUST A LITTLE UNUSUAL. I WASN'T PREPARED FOR IT MYSELF. I'M SORRY.
WHAT'S TO BE SORRY FOR? IT ISN'T LIKE THIS IS ANYONE'S FAULT.
I WANT THE CHILDREN TO LEAD NORMAL LIVES AND I DON'T WANT TO THINK OF THESE ABILITIES AS A PROBLEM, BUT I DON'T SEE HOW WE'RE GOING TO BE ABLE TO HIDE SOMETHING LIKE THIS FOR LONG
THE POWER CAN BE CONTROLLED. I'VE TAUGHT OTHERS. I CAN START TRAINING LIANA TOMORROW.

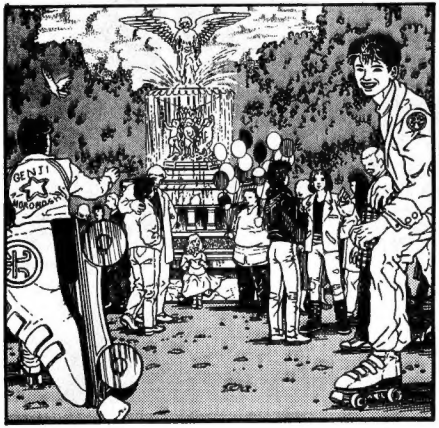
THAT'S NICE. NOW, CAN WE EXPECT ANY SURPRISES FROM JASON?

DIFFICULT TO SAY. I'M NOT SENSING ANYTHING FROM HIM AT ALL. I HOPE SOMETHING HAPPENS. I DON'T WANT HIM TO FEEL SO ALIENATED FROM THE OTHER CHILDREN.

I'M WORRIED ABOUT HIM. I SAW SOME KIDS FROM SCHOOL PICKING ON HIM THE OTHER DAY BECAUSE HE'S SMALL AND PRETTY.

IFACTS

BURIED
TREASURES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